

18

Mr. MARSH'S
SERMON
AT
St. MARYS Church
IN
CAMBRIDGE.

UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
CAMBRIDGE

Nov 11 1891

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

ST. JAMES

THE
Vanity and Danger
OF
MODERN THEORIES.
A
SERMON

Preach'd at St MARYS Church

IN

CAMBRIDGE,

On SUNDAY the 13th Day of *August*,
1699.



By RICHARD MARSH, A. M. and
Fellow of St John's College.

CAMBRIDGE,

Printed at the *University Press*, for Edmund
*Jeffer*y, Bookfeller in Cambridge, 1699.

Imprimatur.

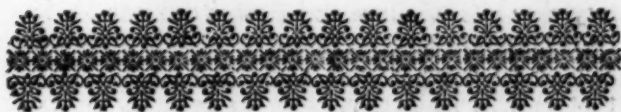
GUL. DAWES, Procan.

HUMF. GOWER, SS. Theol. pro D^{na} *Margareta* Prof

GUL. SAYWELL, Coll. *Jes.* Præfct.

JA. JOHNSON, Coll. *Sid. S.* Magist.

14-282



JOB XXXVIII. ver. iv.

Where wast thou, when I lay'd the foundations of the Earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

THE occasion why Almighty God put this question to *Job*, was his going about to sound the Depths of Providence, and to fathom the Divine Proceedings of his Honour and Justice. After all the Disputes between him and his Friends, and their sentiments upon the matter, God in the close appears to him, to Vindicate his own Wisdom, and to Convince him of his Ignorance. The way which his Almighty Wisdom is pleas'd to take, is not to Unravel that Question he had been upon, but to propose to him such further Difficulties, which he himself could not deny; and so to confute his Ignorance, by exposing the Weakness and Folly of it. In this Chapter therefore he sets before him the Great

A

Work

Work of his Creation, with this design, to let him see, that His Wisdom and Power did not lie level to his Understanding; and that it is He alone, who is able to comprehend the Laws and Nature of that World he had made. So *ver. 5th*, and *6th*. *Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastned? or who laid the corner stone thereof?* that is, you plainly perceive my Power and Wisdom in this great Structure, but you cannot see the Hand that guides, nor the Arm that supports it. *Where wast thou, when I laid the foundations of the Earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.* In speaking to which words, I shall do these four things.

First, I shall shew the Weakness of any Attempt of this nature.

Secondly, What Mischief may be done to Religion by it.

Thirdly, I shall consider the usual Plea that is made for such Attempts.

Fourthly, I shall make some Reflections upon the whole.

I. *First*, I shall shew the Weakness of any Attempt of this nature.

The

The greatest, and, I think, the most useful part of our Knowledge consists in finding out the true Bounds and Extent of it: to sound in what Depths we can stand, and how far our Line will reach. For that there are a great many things, whose Natures and Manners of acting are above our Comprehension, is too plain to be deny'd; and there needs no more to be said upon that, in which Mankind are agreed. Now if this be true, one wou'd at first sight think, that the Wisdom and Power of God in the Creation, shou'd pass all Understanding; and that an Essay upon such a Subject as the World, wou'd be almost as vain, as to pretend to make one. In treating upon other things we sometimes meet with Difficulties, which we cou'd not well foresee, and which don't appear, till we are got a great way in: but in this we may view at the very Entrance the inaccessible Height, and the first Step tells us, what Success we may expect. The way by which Men proceed in so bold an Undertaking, in short is this: they are pleas'd to confine the *Mosaic* History of the Creation to this Earth alone with it's Appurtenances; and think, upon Mechanical Principles, to account for the Manner of it's Formation at first. But admitting the possibility of an *Hypothesis* (which is the utmost it's Author can contend for) the Inference from this must be, that the World was Created, and that *Moses* gives a possible account of that Part of it, unto which they are pleas'd to confine his History. As to the

Creation of the World, that, I think, stands upon better Grounds, it being easy to prove, that it cou'd not have been from Eternity: and as to the *Mosaical* account, he that takes a view of an *Hypothesis*, can hardly believe (but only we are told so) that the one was made for the sake of the other. He that reads the first Chapter of *Genesis*, will find little Scope of exercising his Wit upon a Subject, that is only a bare Historical Narration. We meet there with no *Laws of Gravity*, by which God acted: we have his Power only describ'd by his Will, and his Wisdom by his good Pleasure. *In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth, and Let things be*, is all along the Style of this Sacred Writer. It was God's Pleasure the World shou'd be six daies a making; and to give greater Instances of his Power in one day than another: and tho' this admirable Fabrick is contriv'd in the greatest Harmony and Proportion, yet God cannot be suppos'd to be confin'd to our Waies and Methods of acting, and Conceptions of things; and therefore we have no reason to exclude any Part of the Universe from the six daies Creation, whatever seeming Disproportion may appear to us in the Work. This I take to be an unhappy Mistake, and goes more upon Mechanical Principles, than upon a just Sense of an Almighty Power. If we will believe *Moses*, we must believe the Account he gives; and it do's not become us to make any Alteration in it, tho' it shou'd suit never so well with our Schemes. When Texts
are

are forc'd off from their Natural and Obvious Sense, and from those Interpretations, of which they have been so long in Possession, this Consideration alone is enough to discover the Weakness of such a Design.

But *Secondly*, Besides the ill Success, such Speculations do usually meet with from *Scripture*, the Principles upon which they are founded are so Precarious, that they find but little better Encouragement. There cannot be a plainer Instance of this, than the Clashing of such Authors in their Opinions. For one *Hypothesis* is no sooner out, but 'tis *suck'd up*, like their Notions of the *Planets*, by a greater Force and *Gravitation* of another. We have seen a *Des-Cartes* run down, whose Reputation is *absorb'd* by the more prevailing Power of new *Theories*: tho' if we take a view of Them, we shall find they have not had the Happiness of giving any greater Satisfaction. The saying something New and Surprising, makes such Speculations at first to be in Vogue, and gives them a Reputation; but a little Time wears this off, and then Men find they are just as Wise as they were before. There's no end of such Philosophical Solutions; and indeed the Reason is, because there is no sure treading at the Beginning; the Natures of things being to us wholly unaccountable. Had God design'd us for so nice a Search into his World, he wou'd have given us other Senses, and not such as can skim only the Surface, but can go no deeper.

There is one thing hath advanc'd the Reputation of such Speculations, and that is, the *Mathematical Learning*, with which they appear in the World. But notwithstanding this, it is not in the power of that Science, to give us any clearer account of the Nature of Things: and how high soever we may imagine to Soar by the help of This, I doubt such things as these will still be above us. We may Calculate, as long as we please, the Force and Powers of Bodies; but this will never make the Natures of them the more known, or Natural Philosophy the less uncertain. And 'tis observable, that *Des-Cartes*, whose Principles are now out of Repute, was himself no mean *Mathematician*: and altho' the Masters of this Science are agreed in the Demonstrations which properly belong unto it, yet that they are not so in their Observations upon Nature, their different *Hypotheses* are so many undeniable Instances: which shews, that tho' as *Mathematicians*, yet they have not hitherto agreed as *Natural Philosophers*. It may be demonstrably prov'd, that the World was Created: but when we go about to Dive into the Manner of it, there indeed we are wholly at a loss, and we shew more Vanity and Presumption in our Reasonings, than Truth and Solidity. A Man wou'd Smile at the Folly of him, that shou'd pretend to give an account of the curious Make of a Watch, when he hardly knows how to wind it up: and yet we are so far from knowing how the World was Created, that it is to be question'd, whether

whether we understand the most ordinary Appearances in it; the Structure of the least Insect being able to Baffle the greatest Philosopher. 'Tis the observation of a Noble Person (and of one, who knew as much of Nature, as any whatever) that we are not so Competent Judges of Wisdom, as we are of Justice and Veracity; for these last nam'd are to be estimated by Eternal and Fixed Bounds or Rules, which are very intelligible to a Moderate Understanding: but as for Wisdom, the more Profound it is, the less we are able to look thro' it, and penetrating to the Bottom of it, to judge knowingly of it's Actions. Thus far that great Man. And it wou'd become others to imitate him in his Modesty, as well as in that diligent Search, which he made in Nature. Philosophy, as well as Religion, teacheth a Man to be humble and modest: he that makes This his study, will find his greatest Discoveries to be those of his Weakness and Ignorance. Such an Ignorance, as appears after a strict and rational Search into the Mysteries either of Nature or Revelation, is the true Mother both of Devotion in Religion, and Modesty in Philosophy; and we need not be afraid of being thought either *Papists* in the one, or *Aristotelians* in the other.

II. I come now to the *Second* part, which I at first propos'd, *viz.* to consider what Mischief may be done to Religion by such Attempts.

The

The Christian Church hath had its Obscure Age, in which Men believ'd almost every thing, and knew little or nothing: but now the Tide is turn'd, and the Stream runs as high for Knowledge and Reason, against Faith and Revelation. Men are turning *Levellers* in Religion, as they were of old in Government; and nothing now must pass for an Article of their Faith, but what is of the same Height with their Reason. This is what the *Libertines* of this Age stand upon: if you wou'd have them believe any thing; you must make the Manner of it intelligible. But 'tis well worth a Man's while to consider, whether such Men ought to be gratify'd with Explications of Mysteries in Religion: this perhaps hath been done too much already; and they not being able to Sound these Deep Things of God, and yet to pretend to it, hath given the Adversaries of our Faith, too great occasion for Triumph: and I am apt to believe, it will be impossible to satisfy, either a *Socinian* by an explication of the Mystery in the *Trinity*, or an *Atheist* by an *Hypothesis*. For to keep to this of the Text: he that will not believe a God, from that Order and Regularity he sees in the World, and from an Irresistible Conviction of his own Being, that he must necessarily come to one that is Eternal, will never be convinc'd by weaker Evidence, much less by Conjectures and bare Possibilities: and therefore, without any long Deductions, we may gather, that such things as these portend no good to Religion; and that upon these following accounts.

First,

First, The *Atheist* sets himself against God and Religion, and it will be no little Satisfaction to him, to have an *Hypothesis* run down; and he will think the Story of *Cadmus* reviv'd, when he sees Systems of the World, and Explications of Faith rising up, and fighting one another to death: and so from the Weakness of Men's Reason, and Inconsiderateness of such Attempts, he will be apt to Triumph over the Cause of God and Religion. The *Atheist* may, if he please, have Demonstration for the Being of a God, and Creation of the World; and he has all the Moral Evidence of the *Mosaical* Account, which is possible to be had at such a distance: he that will not be satisfy'd with Demonstration in the one case, and with the highest Probability in the other, will not be satisfy'd with light and Airy Notions. But he is willing, I believe, to drop such Arguments as these, which are too Hardy for him; and must, if he wou'd reason as impartially as other Men, be convinc'd by them. He finds now, we have a Weaker Side, and he's willing there to attack us; as having either more hopes of Victory, or at least of being more Secure from the danger of Conviction. From this he may form a more Specious Pretence: You tell me, says he, of the World's being Created, and you give me a fine story and explication of it: pray, *first*, how come you to know this? and what reason have I to believe the Wonders of Your *Comet*, more than of any other Romance? and *secondly*, how comes it that you cannot agree a-

B

mong

mong your selves? do you think to convince me This Way, who am so hardy, as to stand out against what all the rest of the World call a Demonstration? These and the like, however Foolish they may be, are the Natural Consequences, that such Men draw from an *Hypothesis*; and however good and pious the Intention is, yet I crave leave to say, it do's not answer the Design. One weak Argument do's a cause more hurt, than Twenty stronger can do it good: as the vicious Life of one Man brings a Scandal upon the whole Body: not that there is the least Ground at all for this; but we find, the World is govern'd by Examples more than Reason, and judgeth more by Appearance, than Truth.

Secondly, Let us come down a step lower, and we meet with *Deism*: the Men of this rank pretend to believe a God, and Natural Religion, such as they are pleas'd to make it, but deny Revelation; let us then try, of what service an *Hypothesis* may be, in order to convince them of the Truth and Certainty of it. The great Design of these Men is to give a Rational Account of the *Mosaical* Creation; and where the Sacred Writer is either silent, or goes off from Mechanical Rules, there the *Philosopher* steps in, to help him out in the matter; and rather than *Mechanism* must be broke, the Sacred Text must be rack'd into Confession of it. Daies must be taken for Years; and as if this was but just enough

enough for the Formation of the Earth with it's Appurtenances, the rest of the Universe must be excepted out of the Account. Philosophy it seems is proud, and can't Bend, but *Scripture* must, tho' it Breaks. Do Men think thus to promote the Cause of God and Religion? Is this to defend the Perspicuity and Light of the *Scriptures*? Can we think this will make the *Deist* in love with *Scripture*, when we treat of it so boldly and irreverently our selves? Are Men to measure the true Meaning of Texts only by the Skill they pretend to have in Philosophy? We are indeed commanded to try all our Doctrines by *Scripture*; but I never heard before, that the true Meaning of *Scripture* was to be try'd by an *Hypothesis*: and I am apt to believe, if St. *Paul* was now alive, he wou'd tell us, that this falls under that sort of Philosophy, which he bids us *take heed of*. *Deism* makes but too great an Appearance in the World, both for Number and Quality; if it ow'd not its Rise at first to those disingenuous Abuses, which have been put upon *Scripture*, yet it is certainly fed and nourisht by them: and if so, the blame ought to lie upon Those, that start such bold Conjectures; and when it shall please God to give them a sense of their Errours, they ought to ballance the ill they have done, by retracting them as openly, as they have publish'd them to the World. Whatever Esteem some Men have for the Holy *Scriptures*,

'tis to be wisht, they wou'd shew as great a Love for Them, as they do for their own Notions; that they wou'd bend their *Hypotheses* to the *Scriptures*, and not the *Scriptures* to their *Hypotheses*; and that they wou'd see first what account God gives of his World, before they think upon one of their own.

Thirdly, This loose way of interpreting *Scripture* to serve an *Hypothesis*, gives too great a Colour for the *Socinian* Interpretation of it. We see what Some have made of the First Chapter of *St. John*; and we see what Some have made of the First Chapter of *Genesis*: if we enquire into the Reasons of both, we shall find, they are too near ally'd; for the one can't conceive, how our Saviour can be God; nor the other, how God's Wisdom can be justify'd, without such an Interpretation. I am far from running the Parallel all along between them; yet they both seem to agree in their bold Searches of things above their Reason: and when they meet with a place of *Scripture* for their Purpose, they treat it with much the same Modesty and Ingenuity, by making it speak whatsoever they please. But however this may be, we may well suppose such loose Interpretations as these keep the *Socinians* in Countenance, and give them that very Advantage against us, which we have against them, *viz.* by shewing how plainly the Doctrine of the *Trinity* is deliver'd in *Scripture*; and that

that we are not put to those Sorry Shifts and far fetcht Interpretations, to which their Cause is expos'd. This is a plain and manifest Advantage we have over them: and how far some Mens indulging themselves in such a Liberty to serve an *Hypothesis*, has expos'd the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, by giving its Adversaries an occasion of returning our own Complaint against them, upon our selves, I shall leave others to judge.

Fourthly, such rash Attempts may have a dangerous Influence even upon Pious and well meaning Christians. They may imagin, that the Certainty of an Article of Religion depends upon the Strength of an *Hypothesis*; and when this falls, they may begin to doubt of that Truth, which it was set up to defend. Every Man has not either the Parts, or Education, or Opportunity of making a through search into Controversies about Religion: and as he must trust others for the truth of a matter of Fact, that he can't go to see himself; so he must to the Skill and Ingenuity of another for the Proof of that in *Divinity*, which he either wants Parts or Opportunity himself to defend. Men therefore that put out any thing in defence of Religion, ought to be very sure of their Hand; for shou'd they miscarry, even pious and good Christians will be too apt to impute the weakness of the Person, to the weakness of the Cause; and so instead of

being defended, Religion suffers from such Mens Rashness and Indiscretion. The only good use can be made of an *Hypothesis*, I think, is to let us see our own Ignorance; that after the utmost Application and Search into the Nature of things, we miserably Grope in the Dark; and that whatever pretences we make to this sort of Knowledge, we shew only the Vanity and Affectation of it. This is what appears to a Considering Man at first view; but every one is not able to make a good use of it, and to take things by the right Handle: and therefore from these and the like Considerations we may modestly conclude at least, that such Attempts do no good to Religion.

III. I come now to the *Third* part, *viz.* to consider the usual Plea that is made for such Attempts. We live, say they, in an Inquisitive Thinking Age; and what pass'd for Reason in former times, will not do so now. Men are not to be put off with Mysteries, and other things, that can't be explain'd; you must break the Shell, or else they'll believe, there's nothing in it: the Vulgar Exposition, we are told, is less Rational: there must be a consideration had of Nature, Reason, Philosophy, and just Decorum in the several Parts of it. This is the sum of their Plea, and upon which I shall make these following Observations.

First,

First, What, I wonder, has Nature and Philosophy to be concern'd in the case? is not this the Work of an Almighty Being? have we any other Account of the Time, the World was Created in, than from *Scripture*? and cou'd not we have believ'd this to have been done in an Instant, if it had been so reveal'd? is there any other reason to be assign'd for the Creation of the World in six daies, than the Pleasure of it's Almighty Author? Surely we are not arriv'd to that Height, as to measure the Power and Wisdom of God, by that Scantling of them we perceive in our selves. What if the Creation of the Earth had took up five of the six daies, and all the rest of the World but one? is this any Blemish upon God's Wisdom? If this be so, we may as well charge his Goodness, for not Creating the World before he did it; there being no other reason, as far as I can conceive, either why he did it not sooner, or why he was six daies a doing it, or why more was done in one Day than another, than the Free Will and Good Pleasure of this Almighty Being. He that argues from his own, to the manner of God's acting, do's not seem to argue as becomes a Creature: to say, God has done a thing such a way, therefore 'tis done with great Wisdom and Goodness, is indeed a safe and a Christian way of arguing; but to argue backwards, and to say, Such a way is Wise and Good, therefore God has done it this way, smells too much of Vanity
and

and Presumption; and instead of God, it looks like proudly setting our Selves at the Top of all things. And therefore, as we live in an *Inquisitive*, so, I hope, we live in a *Christian Age*, that will no more part with their Faith than their Senses: and as this Church has asserted the latter against *Popery* and *Superstition*; so, I don't doubt, it will assert the former against *Atheism* and *Deism*. We don't think we have any more occasion to part with our Faith, in those things which are above, than to part with our Reason, in those things which are within our Comprehension: and therefore let the Men of this Age be as Inquisitive as they please, yet we don't pretend to give a Solution of what cannot be given, or to gratify the Weakness of Their Faith, at the Expence and Hazard of our own.

For, *Secondly*, 'tis evident, that no *Hypothesis* has or can give us any reasonable Satisfaction about the first Formation of Things; and perhaps the Authors themselves are in their private Thoughts of the same Opinion: now to pretend to give an Account of what can't be done, is to *expose* Religion, instead of defending it. To say, that this is an Inquisitive Age, and that Men will have an Explication of God's Power, and manner of Creating the World, is no sufficient Plea, and, with submission, ought to be overrul'd: for if Men will

will not be satisfy'd with such reasons as can be given; they ought not to be gratify'd with those, which only expose a Cause. A Demonstration is never the worse for it's not being understood; nor a Reason the weaker, because some Men's Interests and Lusts will not let them be convinc'd by it: but when we drop the best Methods of Conviction, and go upon Conjectures and Fancies of our own, whatever Reputation we may get in the World our selves, we do no real service to Religion.

Thirdly, He that wou'd defend Religion like a wise and good Christian, must not endeavour to raise it at one place, by depressing it at another. The *Hypotheses* and Systems of this Age seem to have gone off from this Rule; and their Authors, at the same time they have endeavour'd to give a clearer Revelation of God's Wisdom from Nature, have drawn the Veil over it in *Scripture*: and therefore it can be no Plea for them, that go this way to work. If they think to do any good by such a Method, they are under a great mistake; for Religion had better be without it. We see every day what bold Attempts are made upon Revelation; and some Criticks, to raise their own, have expos'd the Reputation of the *Scripture*; so that there is need of all the Caution,

C

tion, how we treat these Sacred Books: and a wise Christian will not so much as publish one Thought to the World, that gives the least occasion of Weakning this grand Pillar of his Faith.

Fourthly, Whatever Explications Men require in Religion, and how hard soever they are otherwise to believe; yet this Vanity and Presumption shew'd it's self in most Ages of the Church; and we have plain Prints of it from *Scripture*, even in the Apostles times. There is so remarkable a passage of this in *St. Paul's* first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, Chapter the 15. about the *Resurrection*; that I can't forbear taking Notice of it. Some of these *Corinthians*, no doubt, pretended to be great *Virtuoso's*, and wou'd have had the Apostle given a Philosophical Account of the Doctrine he Preach'd, as may appear from the twelfth verse, *How say some amongst you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?* This cou'd proceed from nothing else, but the Difficulty they conceiv'd to be in it: what way then do's the Apostle take with these Men? Why he proves the Certainty of our own, from that of our Saviour's Resurrection, for the truth of which he produc'd a Cloud of Witnesses. This did not seem to give them satisfaction; but they bogg'd still at the Nature and Difficulty of the thing, as may farther appear from that question, which at the thirty fifth verse, he makes one of them to put:

put: *But some will say, How are the dead rais'd up? and with what body do they come?* To which St. Paul answers with a just reproof of their Infidelity, verse the thirty sixth, *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickned, except it die;* and so go's on to give them a general Idea of God's Power by this Similitude: but he do's not enter at all into the Manner of the thing; nor takes the least notice of those Objections, which no doubt were most of them known to that Age, and which the *Infidels* of our Times make so much Noise and Dust about. This, tho' not immediately belonging to the Text, is undoubtedly a parallel Case: from which we may draw this Inference, that if an inspir'd Apostle did not think fit to unravel the Nature of such Mysteries, or explain the manner of God's Wisdom and Power; it less becomes Us to do it, who cannot pretend to so great and extraordinary Qualifications. The manner of the Creation of the World, I take to be as much a matter of Faith, as the manner of the Resurrection; and indeed if these two with the *Trinity* are not so, it will be difficult to shew, that there is any such thing in *Scripture*: so that from the Authority of St. Paul in this parallel Instance, and from other places, which may be produc'd, we may fairly conclude, that *Scripture* gives not the least Encouragement to such Attempts; much less, when Men will

Systems against the common and receiv'd Interpretations of it.

IV. I shall make some short Reflections upon the whole, and so conclude.

First, It seems strange at first view to consider, what shou'd put Men upon so difficult a Task. Do's not the least thing in the World puzzle us? and is it not God that made the World? and are not His Waies past finding out? How freely do we confess our Ignorance in smaller matters: and surely it becomes our Ingenuity as much, to do it in so great an Instance of infinite Wisdom, as the Creation of the World. If we understood the Nature of any thing, one wou'd think, it shou'd be that of our selves; here surely, if any where, we might perceive the manner of God's Wisdom and Power: and yet we are not conscious of any one thing we do, how we do it; we are as much at a loss to tell how we See, and Hear, as we are sure we have those very Senses. We find Something within us, that thinks, and reflects upon its own Actions: and yet this very Being, tho' sensibly present in the body, can neither tell how it acts upon it, nor indeed account for the manner of its own Operations. The only thing which we know most, is what we consider least, and that is our Ignorance; this we may learn every where, from
the

the Book of Nature, and from that of Revelation: and the Vanity of grasping at what in both of them is incomprehensible, has expos'd Philosophy as well as Religion; and 'tis well if it has not made the *Philosopher* sometimes drop the *Divine*. Whatever extraordinary Parts some Men have, and whatever Improvements they may have made in those Sciences, that tend to farther discoveries in Nature; I can hardly believe, that ever the Reasonableness of the thing, or real Hopes of success cou'd put them at first upon such a design: and if we consider, what is too commonly our Weak Side, we may be able perhaps to assign another reason for it.

Secondly, These Men in their proceedings with the *Atheist*, are forc'd to Suppose the very thing in question, *viz.* the being of a God, who Created Matter out of Nothing: so that no *Theory* which lay's this down as a Principle, can give the *Atheist* satisfaction. Convince him first of the Existence of a God, and he can as easily believe that God cou'd have made the World, without any explication of the Manner of it, as that He created Matter out of Nothing. And the case wou'd be much the same, shou'd we suppose it of a *Deist*: For that Argument, which disproves the Eternity of the World, undeniably proves a Creation of it: and therefore convince him but of the one, and he'll

want the help of no *Theory* to make him believe the other.

Thirdly, Such a design is inconsistent with the End and Meaning of the Text: *Job* insisted at least so far upon his own Innocence, as to conclude he had not deserv'd so great a Punishment, beyond the rest of Mankind; and therefore, tho' he wou'd not call Divine Justice into question, yet he desir'd a clearer Explication of it, as of that which he did not understand: to whom the Lord answered, verse the second, *Who is this that darkneth Counsel by words without knowledge?* and in the Text, *Where wast thou, when I lay'd the foundations of the Earth?* that is, My proceedings with you, is not the only thing above your Reach: no, view this great Fabrick of the World, and see if you can tell me, how I made it at first? If you can't, sure you have no Reason to inquire, by what Methods I govern my Creatures in it. So that if there is any Force in this Argument (and sure there is, for 'tis God's own reasoning) this plainly discovers the Vanity of such an Attempt. The Manner of God's creating the World is not compar'd with the general and ordinary, but with the particular and extraordinary Method of God's Providence, as is plain in the case of *Job*: and therefore if the Difficulties be insuperable on the one side, they must (if there is any force in the Argument) be so on the other.

Fourthly

Fourthly and lastly, Tho' a good use may be made of Philosophy in Religion, yet 'tis not Safe, nor Prudent to venture it much upon that Bottom. For the Solutions of things in Nature, are different in one Age, from what they were in another, and will, I fear, be so, as long as the World lasts; there being no reason, either from the Success of others, or consideration of our own Capacities, to expect it shou'd be otherwise: and therefore this can be of little force in the scale for Religion, which ought to turn upon it's own Weight of fixt and immutable Arguments. As Men's Bodies continue the same, tho' the Mode for Apparel alters daily; so shou'd Religion do, however agreeable 'tis made by Philosophy: and we are not to alter the Sense of *Scripture*, as often as New Reasons are found out in Nature, if we wou'd not be thought to bring down *Scripture* to the same Uncertainty: for however Philosophy may get over it, Religion will have a harder Task to wipe off such an Imputation. We have not that concern for Philosophy, as Religion: we may get Reputation from the one, but our Happiness must come from the other: and they who go about to force the obvious Sense of *Scripture* for the sake of an *Hypothesis*, do in effect cast a Reflection upon the *Spirit* that indited it; and have something more to answer for, besides the Vanity of the Attempt.

To

To conclude. He that takes a view of the World, will find all things calculated for his Admiration, but little or nothing for his Comprehension: and he that looks into *Scripture*, will see God's Wisdom, and his own Ignorance, every where writ in great Characters. I shall end all with that of the *Psalmist*, Psal. 104. ver. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy Works! in Wisdom hast thou made them all: the Earth is full of thy Riches.*

THE END.



